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Gendering Social Citizenship: Textile Workers in post-Yugoslav States

Chiara Bonfiglioli

Working Paper 2013/30



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University of Edinburgh, School of Law
The Europeanisation of Citizenship in the Successor States of the Former Yugoslavia
(CITSEE)

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Gendering Social Citizenship: Textile Workers in post-Yugoslav States

Chiara Bonfiglioli, University of Edinburgh¹

Abstract

The paper analyses social citizenship in post-Yugoslav states from a gendered perspective. It explores the parallel transformations of citizenship regimes and gender regimes on the basis of the case study of the textile industry, a traditionally “feminised” industrial sector in which employment rates have significantly declined in the last twenty years. By comparing the cases of Leskovac (Serbia) and Štip (Macedonia), the paper shows that transformations in social citizenship had profound implications when it comes to gender regimes. The overall deterioration of labour and welfare rights in the region had major consequences on women’s position as workers and citizens, producing the demise of the “working mother” gender contract which existed during socialist times. The “retraditionalisation” of gender relations in the post-Yugoslav region, therefore, is not only a consequence of nationalist discourses, but is also a direct result of transformations in social citizenship which occurred during the post-socialist transition.

Keywords:

Social citizenship, gender, textile workers, post-socialist transition, globalisation

1. Introduction

In May 2013, the EU Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality published a Report on women’s rights in the Balkan accession countries (2012/2255(INI)) calling for a European Parliament Resolution on this theme. Together with gender-based violence, discrimination on the basis of gender and sexual orientation and lack of equal representation in politics, women’s under-representation in the labour market in the Western Balkans was mentioned as a matter of urgent concern.² In the 1990s and 2000s, employment rates in the region underwent steep decline as a result of post-socialist transition, the Yugoslav break-up, and the emergence of new post-

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² <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/pressroom/content/20130520IPR08610/html/Balkan-countries-still-need-to-deliver-on-gender-equality> (last accessed 25.07.2013).

In the same Report, the Opinion of the Committee on Foreign Affairs noted (page 19 of 22) that “women’s employment rates in the Western Balkan countries remain very low and that women remain under-represented in the labour market; calls on the governments of the Western Balkan countries to encourage the active participation of women in the labour market by promoting, inter alia, measures to secure better working conditions, equal pay for equal work, lifelong learning, flexible work schedules and a fair balance between family life and work, as well as measures to reduce the gender pay gap and, consequently, the gender pension gap.”

Yugoslav citizenship regimes (Shaw and Štiks 2012). The growth of social inequalities, the rise of unemployment rates and the deterioration of labour conditions and social rights have been affecting both men and women in the post-Yugoslav space. Yet, because of new and old forms of gender discrimination in the spheres of production and reproduction, women have been more vulnerable to economic and social changes. As a result, women's unemployment and gender pay gaps have been on the rise.³

This paper aims to address the question of transformations in social citizenship in post-socialist, post-Yugoslav states. Social citizenship is analysed from a gender perspective, by considering changes in citizenship regimes in interaction with changes in gender regimes. In order to analyse these transformations, I have chosen the case study of the textile industry, a traditionally "feminised" industrial sector in which employment rates have significantly declined during the transition. Since shop floor workers in the garment industry were and are mainly women, the social and economic transformations occurring in this sector had major consequences on women's labour, and in turn, on women's position as workers and citizens across the former Yugoslavia.

Throughout the paper I follow T.H Marshall's definition of *social citizenship*. Marshall analysed citizenship by dividing it into three elements: "civil, political and social". While the civil element was defined as "the rights necessary for individual freedom", and the political element as "the right to participate in the exercise of political power", the social element of citizenship was defined as "the whole range from the right to a modicum of welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in society" (Marshall 1950; 2009:149). Social rights were seen by Marshall as necessary in order to expand the egalitarian potential of citizenship, against the inequalities created by social class in capitalist societies. In positive terms, more recently, social rights have been defined as "individuals' lifelong rights to income maintenance, and to access to employment, to health services, and to accommodation on the basis of need." (Roche 2002: 71). Together with welfare entitlements, the right to labour and the right to a living wage, therefore, have been singled out as a crucial component of social citizenship (Zeitlin and Whitehouse 2003:774-775).

Feminist scholars have long discussed the interdependence between citizenship – particularly social citizenship – and gender. The concept of *gender regime*, notably, was coined by feminist scholars after Esping-Andersen's "welfare regime" typology (Walby 1997). For instance, the dominant Western European welfare regime created during the Fordist phase of capitalism – the "breadwinner-dependent model" – has been singled out as a specific *gender regime*, since the breadwinning, waged labourer role in the public sphere has been associated with

³ On the gender wage gap in Western Balkan countries, see also Apostolova 2010. On the gender wage gap and on women's unemployment in the Macedonian labour market, see Kazandziska, Risteska, and Schmidt 2012.

men and masculinity, while women have been often cast in a dependent role in the private sphere, and women's unpaid domestic labour has long been "naturalised" as a feminine task (Federici 2012). Gender regimes, thus, can be defined as "institutionalized practices and forms of gendered systems of domination that are constituted as social ordering principles in all societies." (Young, 2002: 56). Citizenship regimes and gender regimes, therefore, can be seen as mutually constitutive, since gender is a fundamental organising principle of social difference at the level of the state: "Not only do state policies constrain gender relations, but ideas about the differences between men and women shape the ways in which states are imagined, constituted, legitimated." (Gal and Kligman, 2000: 4).

The interdependency between citizenship regimes and gender regimes became an object of scholarly debates among feminist scholars in the course of post-socialist transition in Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe. Scholars have noted the complex effects of post-socialist transition on gender relations, and the multiple ways in which post-socialist citizenship regimes and gender regimes have transformed hand in hand in the last twenty years (Daskalova et al 2012; Kahlert and Schafer 2011). Following Gal and Kligman (2000), I seek here to abandon a teleological framework implicit in many scholarly discourses about post-socialist transition in Eastern Europe. Usually this approach to 'transition', argue Gal and Kligman, "homogenizes state socialism, which, despite its distinctive ideological and systemic structure, nevertheless took many forms and had many phases in the different countries of the region. This approach also homogenizes capitalism, glossing over its varying and uneven forms, and the partially contingent, open-endedness of social change." (Gal and Kligman, 2000: 11).

The open-ended, ambivalent nature of social change in the region of the former Yugoslavia becomes apparent when considering both state socialism and post-socialist capitalism from the perspective of the industrial working class, and from the point of view of the relation between the workers, the market and the state. While during socialism industrial workers were seen as the main source of political legitimacy for the Yugoslav self-management system, and while they were rewarded with a number of social rights and welfare entitlements, the gap between the socialist doctrine of self-management and workers' everyday lives was always apparent, since the Yugoslav economy depended upon internal and external market imperatives (Unkovski-Korica, 2011; Woodward, 1995).

Workers' living standards across Yugoslavia differed as a result of internal economic differentiation, and started to worsen further in the 1980s with the crisis of the Yugoslav Federation (Musić 2013 a; Ćurčić 2006). The most dramatic changes, however, took place throughout the 1990s with the Yugoslav wars. At the end of the 1990s, in the post-socialist, post-conflict setting which characterised post-Yugoslav states, the industrial working class disappeared as a political subject and workers became strongly disempowered by material processes such as privatisation, de-industrialisation and war profiteering. Neo-liberal and nationalist discourses became hegemonic, and working class struggles came to be seen as a backward remnant of

the socialist past which needed to be overcome (Musić 2013b). The 'nation' became the central constituency of elites' discourses, as opposed to the 'working people' of socialist times (Papić, 1994). At the same time, similarly to what happened in other post-socialist contexts, poverty, unemployment, and class inequalities started to have a "stronger and stronger influence on life chances and well-being" (Stenning 2005:992).

The complexity and ambivalences of post-socialist transition are addressed here from a gender and class perspective. Taking the case study of textile workers in different post-Yugoslav states, the paper looks at transformations in *social citizenship* which have occurred in the last twenty years, arguing that these transformations had profound implications when it comes to *gender regimes*. The demise of the socialist citizenship regime of welfare and labour, together with the rise of nationalism, war, economic decline, globalisation processes and rising inequalities, implied a demise of a specific "working mother" gender regime promoted by state socialism, and radical transformations in gender regimes in different post-Yugoslav states. The main question of the paper, therefore, is the following: How did citizenship regimes transform hand in hand with gender regimes and in which way has the increasing precariousness of social citizenship affected women's position as citizens and workers?

The paper has an exploratory, comparative nature, and combines an extensive literature review of scholarship concerning transformations of citizenship as well as textile labour and gender in the post-Yugoslav space with the gathering of empirical data in the form of in-depth interviews. The empirical data for the paper was gathered through twelve interviews conducted between December 2012 and February 2013 in the textile cities of Leskovac, in Southern Serbia, and of Štip, in Eastern Macedonia. The interviews were conducted with present and former textile workers, textile company owners, trade unionists, NGO representatives and trade representatives, and aimed to gather the widest possible array of information on the social and economic changes that have affected the industrial sector of textile and garment production in the last twenty years. Transformations in the textile industry in Slovenia and Croatia were also considered through analysis of press material and gathering of secondary literature.

In the first part of my paper I outline the transformations in social citizenship and in gender regimes which occurred in the last twenty years across the former Yugoslavia, as a result of post-socialist transition. Secondly, I consider the changes in the textile industry that occurred in post-Yugoslav states, and the position of women workers in the garment industry. Building on the case of textile workers, I address the fundamental connection between social citizenship regimes and gender regimes, and the effect of the post-Yugoslav, post-socialist transition on women's lives as workers, welfare recipients and citizens, and on gendered configurations of public and private in the cities of Leskovac and Štip. Rather than exclusively singling out women as vulnerable subjects in the post-Yugoslav context, the paper situates the condition of women textile workers within the general framework of industrial

workers' deterioration of citizenship rights, exploring the intersection of different axes of power and inequality – notably gender, class and labour.

2. Gender regimes and post-socialist transition in the former Yugoslavia

In socialist Yugoslavia, employment became a crucial means to access wages, social insurances, healthcare, cheap housing and paid holidays, which were also subsidised through the construction of specific holiday resorts for factory workers (Grandits and Taylor 2010). Workers could also easily access credits for other major expenses. As Woodward notes, "(...) the employment status defined the identities, economic interests, social status and political loyalty of Yugoslav citizens. One's place of work was the centre of one's social universe" (2003:76). Bob Deacon (2000:147) summarised the welfare state contract of socialist regimes as: "provision of highly subsidized prices on food, housing, transport and basic necessities, guaranteed employment, adequate health and education provision and small differentials between the wages of workers, professionals and managers, in return for the political quietude of the population". Job security was a crucial feature of this system (Potkonjak and Škokić 2013: 81-82)

While employment in the industry and in the services sector guaranteed a certain amount of social rights, Yugoslavia was far from being a classless society (Suvin 2012). The Yugoslav economy's openness to the world market, as well as its politics of economic decentralisation, created an increasing diversification of industrial production, and accordingly, an increasingly stratified society, in which industrial, administrative and urban citizens of most developed republics were benefiting from higher working and welfare standards, in comparison to the rural, unemployed and dependent population, notably in less developed republics. The 1981 census showed that out of 13 million people aged 19-60, only 7 million were in employment. One million were registered as unemployed, one million citizens worked abroad as *Gastarbeiters*, and 4 million citizens were not fully accounted for in the statistics, among which were precarious seasonal and non-registered workers, peasant women, housewives, students, self-employed artisans. Around 20% of the population, thus, could be classified as living in marginal conditions (Suvin 2012: 50). Unemployment was particularly high among women and young people, but it was largely invisible (Woodward 2003:78). The uneven development of the Yugoslav Federation – and the gap between the doctrine of socialist self-management and workers' actual life conditions – was made visible in a number of "Black Wave" movies and documentaries in the 1970s and 1980s, notably in the different documentaries shot by Želimir Žilnik on the life of the working class (Ćurčić 2006).

The contradictions of the Yugoslav system were apparent also when it came to another tenant of the socialist doctrine: women's emancipation. Since 1946, women's political, social and economic rights were inscribed in the Federal Constitution, and women's access to education and labour increased enormously for the post-war generation, also as a result of general processes of urbanisation and industrialisation.

While after the war peasants constituted 70% of the population, around 10 million people, in the mid-1970s the peasant population amounted to around 36%, or 7.5 million people, with 1.5 million “peasant workers” fluctuating between agriculture and industry (Suvin 2012: 46-47). Women’s entry into the labour market – particularly in rural areas – was presented as a factor of modernisation by socialist authorities. Textile factories, in particular, were seen as having a modernising impact on women’s lives, particularly when it came to women from ethnic minorities and from less wealthy republics (Vodopivec 2012).

The result of socialist politics in the field of women’s emancipation, however, were mixed, since women’s work outside the home continued to be considered as secondary to men’s work. Despite important gains in women’s access to education and the labour market, women’s employment rates in Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s were closer to Western Europe than to Eastern European socialist regimes, scoring around 33% of the total workforce (Woodward 1985: 245), with important differences between the different regions of the country. The labour market was segregated by gender, and women were mainly employed as unskilled workers or in “feminised”, low-paid professions, such as agriculture, education, social services, and in labour intensive branches such as the textile industry (Mežnarić 1985). Women’s presence in executive positions was also limited, and further differentiated according to ethnicity (Reeves 1990). The task of domestic work continued to be performed solely by women, despite their participation in paid work (Massey et al. 1995). Traditional gender roles were perpetuated at the level of the family, and the fast urbanisation of the country was not sufficient to dispel patriarchal values and practices in the private sphere (Denich 1976; Woodward 1985). Sexist images were also present in popular consumer culture since the 1950s. The ideal “new woman” had to simultaneously be “a diligent and responsible worker, a thrifty housewife, a rational consumer and a devoted mother” (Jambrešić-Kirin and Blagaić 2013:62).

At the same time, despite the ambivalences of socialist emancipation, women’s levels of education increased immensely in the space of a generation, and many educated women could advance in their professional field, particularly in the richest republics such as Slovenia and Croatia. Similarly to other socialist regimes of Eastern Europe, in Yugoslavia women’s access to labour was considered as a primary emancipatory factor, while women’s roles as mothers and care-takers were recognized by the state and “socialised” through a number of welfare arrangements, which were supposed to encourage women’s participation in the labour market (Fodor 2003, 2004; Thelen 2006). Working women gained access to free healthcare, free abortions, free education, extended paid maternity leave of up to a year, canteens and childcare facilities in the workplace, and could benefit from shorter working hours to take care of small children (although all women did not benefit from these possibilities in the same way due to the uneven development of welfare services throughout the country). These welfare measures have been defined by scholars of post-socialist countries as the “worker-mother” or “working mother” gender contract (Zhurzhenko 2001; Hormel 2011). As noted by scholars, while these

policies were effective in ensuring higher rates of labour participation in comparison to Western Europe (Fodor 2004), they also strengthened the gendered division of reproductive labour within the family (Einhorn 2002; Metcalfe and Afanassieva 2005: 399).

The “working mother” gender regime faded away with the disappearance of the socialist regime and with the break-up of Yugoslavia. Similar trends have been occurring across Europe, where both post-socialist and capitalist gender regimes have started to converge towards a new neo-liberal model. “Individualisation” has been singled out as a key trend in Western and Eastern Europe by scholars engaged in comparative welfare research (Pascall and Lewis 2004: 374): “Individualisation of personal and public life is a key trend east and west, and challenges the structures that supported children and care in state and family. Market individualism has attacked the collective assumption of western welfare states and the whole way of life of the planned economies of former communist countries.” The shrinkage in state intervention has brought reduced spending on child care, education, health, pensions, and child benefits (Pascall and Lewis 2004: 376).

In the post-Yugoslav space, the specificity of the post-1989 “transition” is well known: the post-socialist demise of the welfare state has been accompanied by a deeper social and economic crisis, due to the break-up of the Federation and the wars of the 1990s. If 1960s Yugoslavia could be described as a country “aspiring to entry into the category of ‘core’ industrial countries”, in the 1980s and 1990s a phenomenon of “re-peripheralisation” took place for the region vis-à-vis the West (Schierup 1992:79). Economic decline had started already in the 1980s, when foreign debt, inflation and unemployment skyrocketed, and austerity measures were applied in order to meet the conditions of new IMF loans (Woodward 2003: 78-79). During the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, economic decline, inflation and unemployment rose even further, causing an overall destruction of jobs and of industrial development (Stambolieva 2011: 351; see also Meurs and Ranasinghe 2003). It took almost two decades for post-Yugoslav states to reach their 1989 GDP levels, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia have still yet to reach those levels. Unemployment rates are the highest in Europe, and social inequalities have sharply risen in the last twenty years (Stambolieva 2011: 351).

As I will show in the next sections, the textile industry in post-Yugoslav states was profoundly affected by those changes, and the social and economic position of women textile workers worsened as a result of privatisation, de-industrialisation and general loss of social protection for workers (Ćurčić 2006; Miloš 2013). The worsening of labour and social rights intersected with the gendered impact of nationalism, war and internal displacement caused by the war. Feminist scholars have discussed the negative impact of war and militarisation on gender relations, emphasising the process of gendered re-traditionalisation and reaffirmation of patriarchal values provoked by nationalist discourses and by violent conflict (Jambrešić Kirin and Povrzanović 1996; Papić 1994, 1999; Žarkov 2007). Feminist scholars have underlined the vulnerability of citizens in times of ethnic-based and gender-based violence,

notably for ethnic minorities, refugees and displaced persons, deserters, ethnically mixed families, LGBT population and anti-nationalist activists who opposed war and exclusion (Center for Women War Victims, 2002; Mladjenovic 2000; Nikolić-Ristanović 2000).

Women's vulnerability and dependency within the family increased in times of social and economic uncertainty. Women in the region are mainly employed in feminised professions, and more likely to be discriminated against when accessing the labour market, and to work below their educational qualifications. Many women are also engaged in the informal and grey economy of post-conflict societies, such as Bosnia-Herzegovina (Blagojević 2003:69). Women's social exclusion and poverty is stronger among discriminated ethnic minorities, notably among Roma (ERRC 2004). Human trafficking from and across South-East Europe has also emerged as an urgent issue in the war and post-war period (Blagojević 2003: 136-140). The militarisation of post-conflict societies and men's unemployment led to an increase of domestic violence (Nikolić-Ristanović 2000). At the same time, solidarity networks based on the extended family started to function once again as a survival unit, leading to a revival of extended families in the 1990s and 2000s, particularly for lower and middle class families in the suburbs or in provincial towns and villages (Milić 2004). Family networks as a form of "social capital", against the loss of social security, are a characteristic element of post-socialist transition (Daskalova et al. 2012). All these issues are perfectly illustrated by the specific case of women working in the textile industry in post-Yugoslav states that I will analyse in the following section.

3. Women textile workers in the South Eastern European periphery

The fate of textile workers – and of industrial workers more generally – is similar across the former Yugoslavia. Workers' mobilisations against privatisation, de-industrialisation and lack of social rights have increased in recent years. As a result of the world economic crisis of 2008-2009, of economic recession in the Balkans and of growing unemployment and cuts to welfare expenses, the themes of social inequality, exploitation and corruption, have started to receive greater attention and to spur new mobilisations in the public sphere of post-Yugoslav states. Workers' mobilisations against neo-liberal privatisations have recently created alliances with other strata of civil society. In Zagreb, a solidarity movement of students, feminist and political activists was created around the struggle of women employed in the Kamensko textile factory in 2010. The Kamensko factory, founded in 1949, was successful until the mid-1990s, when the process of privatisation started. Some of the shares of the factory were bought by construction firms interested in real estate speculation. Gradually, the mismanaged privatisation and speculation led the company to bankruptcy (Milat 2012). Kamensko workers went on strike demanding

their unpaid wages in the autumn of 2010, gaining considerable public support from students and political activists.⁴

Other workers' protests took place recently across Croatia, in textile factories which have been closed or gone bankrupt as a result of the privatisation process. In Rijeka, last winter, when the 80 workers of the knitwear factory Iris returned from the Christmas holiday, they found out that the Italian owner of the factory had shipped all the sewing machines to Serbia, in order to resume production in a country with lower labour costs. In 1998, one worker died and another was injured due to an explosion in the factory.⁵ Similarly, in Slovenia, a number of textile plants were closed as a result of the privatisation, while the working conditions in existing plants became precarious. The well-known "Mura" textile plant in Murska Sobota, which used to employ thousands of workers, went bankrupt in 2009 and was privatised in 2011, maintaining only a few hundred workers. A special EU funding package was approved to retrain former Mura workers who had been made redundant.⁶ Part of the Mura production was recently delocalized to Serbia through the acquirement of the formerly state plant Prvi Maj in Pirot.⁷

As scholars of gender and globalisation have noted, since the 1980s and 1990s "investment capital has been able to take advantage of wide differences in labour costs across the world by shifting from higher to lower wage economies, but this has not been matched by commensurate ability on the part of labour in low-wage economies to move towards higher-wage contexts. The constant threat of shifting investment to ever lower cost area has served to erode the economic and political power of labour relative to capital and undermine its capacity to bargain for a fairer share of the benefits of globalization" (Beneria, Deere and Kabeer 2012: 4). While women have joined the global labour market in great numbers in the last three decades, global competition and neoliberal deregulation have brought a general decline of income and social security associated with the male breadwinner model, and the growth of low-waged, flexible and informal jobs, both in industrialised and industrialising countries. This phenomenon has been defined as the "feminisation of labour": "the types of employment and labour force involvement traditionally associated with women – insecure, low paid, irregular, etc. – have been spreading relative to the type of employment traditionally associated with men – regular, unionised, stable, manual or craft-based, etc" (Standing 1999: 600).

The "feminisation of labour" is particularly characteristic of the global textile and garment industry, which is traditionally a feminised, low-waged, high-labour intensity industry for foreign export, particularly exposed to shifts in global capital and to a "race to the bottom" in production costs (Musiolek 2000). The overwhelming

⁴ <http://praksa.hr/kamensko/> 15.08.2012. (Last accessed 24.5.2013).

⁵ <http://www.novolist.hr/Vijesti/Rijeka/Sok-u-Pletenini-Iris-S-godisnjeg-na-cestu-Talijan-preselio-pogon-u-Srbiju> 11.1.2013 (Last accessed 24.5.2013).

⁶ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-10-1350_en.htm (Last accessed 24.5.2013).

⁷ <http://www.ekapija.com/website/en/page/646220> (Last accessed 24.5.2013).

presence of women in the garment industry is also determined by gender stereotypes when it comes to the evaluation of women as work force: “Women are considered not only to have naturally nimble fingers, but also to be naturally more docile and willing to accept tough work discipline, and naturally less inclined to join trade unions, than men; and to be naturally more suited to tedious, repetitious, monotonous work” (Elson and Pearson, 1981:93). The association of women with “nimble fingers” is also a result of women’s training in domestic tasks, such as sewing. These skills are portrayed as “natural” – and thus the workforce is described as “unskilled” – because of the naturalisation of women’s domestic work in the private sphere (Elson and Pearson 1981:3; Federici 2012).

In socialist Yugoslavia, gendered stereotypes about women workers were very much present, and women tended to concentrate in “light” industries such as the textile industry (Vodopivec 2012). Textile industries for foreign export started to develop in the 1980s, when socially-owned factories took up outsourced textile production for foreign brands as a way to gain foreign currency (Schierup 1992). The phenomenon defined as “feminisation of labour”, however, was typical of the last twenty years, when textile labour workers started to lose their social security and entitlements as a result of the process of political, social and economic change that has invested post-Yugoslav states, which were once again cast in a “semi-peripheral” position in respect to Europe and the West (Schierup 1992). As I will show in this section, the meaning and value of labour – and the position of workers – radically changed with post-socialist transition. The status of workers in post-Yugoslav states worsened to a great extent, entailing a general precarisation of social and economic rights, and thus, a weakening of political, social and economic citizenship (Ćurčić 2006; Miloš 2013; Vodopivec 2012).

The socially-owned textile industry was a significant economic sector during socialist Yugoslavia, covering approximately 12% of total manufacturing in the 1970s. In the 1980s Yugoslavia “was among the world’s leading producers of textiles and wearing apparel” (Hanzl-Weiss 2004: 932), and Yugoslav fashion brands were sold both locally and internationally. The situation changed dramatically during the 1990s and 2000s, when many textile firms ceased to operate and many employees in the textile sector lost their jobs as a result of the collapse of the internal Yugoslav market, and as a consequence of the privatisation process. The process of privatisation of the previously socially owned textile industry, notably, was characterised by shady agreements, mismanagement and corruption.

Often, the managers of previously socially owned companies appropriated the assets of their enterprises to create private firms. Many of those firms then went bankrupt between the mid-1990s and the early 2000s, with devastating effects on the workers, who were formally also the ‘owners’ of the enterprises in which they worked according to the doctrine of socialist self-management (Stambolieva 2011), and who often had become shareholders of their enterprises in the course of the privatisation process (Musić 2013a). What is more, within these uncertain times of transition, many workers found that they could not claim back decades of social

contributions or years of unpaid wages as a result of the privatisation and bankruptcy of their enterprise. This situation is characteristic not only of textile factories, but of other industrial and public sectors as well, where former social property has been hastily privatised in a clientelistic manner, to the profit of new elites and to the detriment of workers. Trade unions, which traditionally were integrated within state structures during socialist times, did not manage to offer a significant resistance to these changes in the new post-socialist setting. The trade union membership rate also plummeted as a result of the process of de-industrialisation (Pokret za Slobodu 2011; Musić 2013a; see also Eurofound reports 2012).

The number of industrial employees in post-Yugoslav states has plummeted since the transition. The situation has further worsened since the economic crisis of 2008/2009. The unemployment rate in the region ranges from 21% in Croatia up to 26% in Serbia and 31% in Macedonia.⁸ Since the beginning of the 1990s, the economies of SEE countries have been characterised by a strong decline in GDP, high inflation, an increase in the black economy, decreasing employment and high unemployment (Zareva 2004:8; Musić 2013a). In the textile sector, the closure of previously socially owned factories across the region has been accompanied by high unemployment and by a growth in informal and irregular textile labour. At the same time, private companies have been created and the industry is still relevant for the region, particularly when it comes to foreign exports. In Croatia, textile and clothing producers employs approximately 20.000 people (as opposed to 83.000 in the 1990s)⁹; approximately 20.000 employees are also employed in the sector in Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina respectively.¹⁰ The greatest textile production is taking place in Macedonia, with around 40,000 employees in the leather, clothing and textile sector (64.000 in 1989)¹¹, as well as in Serbia, with around 30,000 workers (as opposed to 100,000 during socialist times)¹². The textile sector in Kosovo and Montenegro is very small and oriented towards the internal market.

The existence of a qualified labour force and of the industrial infrastructure developed during socialist times allowed the reconversion of state owned factories into state or private businesses for export, not only in former Yugoslavia but throughout Eastern Europe (Musiolek et al 2004). The proximity of these countries to

⁸ See the indicators provided by the website Trading Economics:

<http://www.tradingeconomics.com/countries> (last accessed 7-08-2013).

⁹ I am combining data from different sources here since complete studies of the industry are not available. For Croatia, see: http://www.just-style.com/analysis/croatia-clothing-sector-could-exploit-eu-accession_id114883.aspx (last accessed 21-5-2013). See also Zelenika and Grilec Kaurić (2011).

¹⁰ For Slovenia, see Kovač, Semolič and Završnik (2009); for BiH, see, http://www.fibre2fashion.com/news/manufacturing-news/newsdetails.aspx?news_id=120900 (Last accessed 21-5-2013).

¹¹ http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=311&film_ID=4&slide_ID=24; <http://www.investinmacedonia.com/node/25> (last accessed 20-05-2013).

¹² <http://www.sindikats.rs/ENG/news.html#85> (last accessed 20-05-2013); on Serbia, see also Jefferson Institute (2004).

Western Europe constitutes a significant competitive advantage when it comes to delivery times. The main type of textile production in the region, in fact, is the one based on the *lohn* or OPT (Outward Processing Trade) process– in which Western partners are sending the textile material and the local factories carry out the sewing and finishing phases (Musiolek 2000; Musiolek et al 2004; CCC 2005). This particular system started in the 1970s and was further developed in the 1980s, with West Germany outsourcing its production to East Germany or to Yugoslavia. The system expanded considerably in the 1990s, as a result of the tariff and custom protection put in place by the EU towards CEE and SEE countries, which reinforced the power of the EU core countries towards candidates and non-candidates to EU accession (Bohle 2005:69). With time, this produced Eastern Europe's increasing dependency on Western markets, transforming the region into "a sewing shop for the EU" (Musiolek et al 2004:16; CCC 2005).

Global competition in the sector has also increased since the 2004 EU enlargement and the 2005 WTO trade agreement on textile and clothing (Smith et al 2005), which has significantly liberalised the global trade of textile from the global South to the global North, leading to a booming of textile sweatshops in Asia. While Western European producers invest in know-how, design and technology, and are able to profit from creation of brands and collections, the labour intensive, sewing phases are constantly outsourced to Eastern Europe, North Africa and Asia through the OPT system, benefiting from the lower labour costs and the lack of protective workers legislation in the global South and the European peripheries. Local manufacturers are pressured to accept the conditions imposed by Western clients, and respond to the global competition over market prices by pushing salaries to the bottom (Musiolek et al 2004; CCC 2005). When foreign direct investment is present through the establishment of multi-national companies in the region, working conditions are not significantly different, and workers' rights are often disregarded, as in the case of Serbia (Musić 2013a).

These processes had devastating consequences for textile workers' rights in the region of the former Yugoslavia. The destruction of the state industry, the widespread unemployment and the lack of job certainty pushed textile workers to accept low wages and poor working conditions in newly founded private companies; the narratives of former and current textile workers testify to this shift, from industrial Fordism to privatisation and de-industrialisation, from a system guaranteeing a certain degree of social security and welfare to a system of neo-liberal capitalism, in which the labour in the textile industry became once again associated with exploitative conditions and lack of workers' rights. As Petrović recently argued: "In the transition from industrial to post-industrial, from socialist to post-socialist societies, the worker as an ideological figure and as a symbol of the value of labour disappeared from public spaces, billboards and banknotes. As a constitutive element of the working class, the worker was moved from society's centre to its margins, to suburbs, to the "third world"" (2013:97).

The textile cities of Leskovac and Štip are often compared in grey literature, and in particular in a European Stability Initiative report (see ESI 2007). The decline of the textile industry in Leskovac is presented as a consequence of stalling privatisation and break of connections with the EU market during the Yugoslav wars and the economic sanctions which affected Serbia. Štip, by contrast, as well as the Bulgarian textile industry, is presented as a success story, mainly due to fast privatisation and Europeanisation processes (ESI 2007). In this section I will show that in fact the processes of post-socialist transition and de-industrialisation occurring in Leskovac and Štip were very similar, and that they had similar effects on textile workers' social security and social citizenship. While the privatisation process has been more successful in Macedonia, leading to a proliferation of private companies, the nature of textile production is characterised by a high degree of dependency from foreign markets and by a race to the bottom when it comes to salaries and social conditions for textile workers. Since in Leskovac the textile sector is almost inexistent, I conducted interviews with former textile workers, men and women, discussing working conditions during socialism and of the effects of post-socialist transition and de-industrialisation. In Štip, where the textile sector is still the main source of employment, I could interview women from different generations who had been working in the textile industry, gaining an in-depth overview on working conditions and social rights before and after the transition. The interviewees' real names have been replaced with pseudonyms. Though I have also interviewed a number of factory owners and trade representatives both in Serbia and Macedonia, in this paper I am focusing on textile workers' experiences and perceptions of post-socialist transition.

3.1. *De-industrialised peripheries: the case of Leskovac*

The town of Leskovac, in Southern Serbia, was locally known as the "little Manchester" in the late nineteenth and twentieth century (similar parallels can be found in other towns across the former Yugoslavia). Important textile factories were present in the interwar period, and in the post-war era the city became the seat of a big textile *kombinat* called Leteks, with a number of subsidiary factories around Leteks in the industrial district. Textile workshops were also opened in the villages surrounding Leskovac, such as Vucje, Lebane, Grdelica and Vlasotince. Leteks produced wool and cotton textiles, which were later sent to other factories in Leskovac and elsewhere in Yugoslavia for the production of apparel garments, uniforms and other finished products. In the 1970s the Leteks factory had more than 3000 workers, organised in three different workshops in the city. The factory was exporting then more than 3 million meters of cloth per year. The main destination of exports was the Soviet Union (Rakić-Vodinelic, Gajin and Reljanović 2013: 65). According to former workers, the clothing produced in the factory was of high quality, and the wages were satisfactory throughout the 1980s. Overtime work was paid around 20% more than the regular working shift. The productivity of labour

was very thoroughly regulated, and workers received bonuses for increased productivity. In Leteks and in the other factories of the region, the workers could count on a canteen serving a warm daily meal. Women workers at Leteks, moreover, could make use of childcare facilities on the premises of the factory. A holiday spa resort was available for workers at subsidised prices in Sijarinska Banja.

After the break-up of Yugoslavia, inflation started to affect industrial production, causing a considerable drop in the value of salaries after the early 1990s. Leteks, however, continued to operate throughout the 1990s, including during the NATO armed intervention of 1999. Around 20% of the workers were dismissed in the early 1990s. In the early 2000s, approximately 50% of the workers remained, around 870 people. A programme of restructuring was inaugurated and between 1st of July 2001 and 13th July 2003, workers went to work but did not receive any salary. An entrepreneur of Serbian origin residing in Australia, Zorica Gajić, bought the factory in 2006, but instead of reinstating production, sold the machinery as scrap. The contract of sale was then annulled since the buyer had failed to fulfil contractual obligations and the factory once again became state property in 2008. The Municipal Court in Leskovac then declared that the Serbian state was once again responsible for paying salary arrears. Since the state did not pay, 167 former Leteks workers filed a lawsuit at the European Courts of Human Rights in Strasbourg (*Anđelić and others vs Serbia*). Five years after the initial lawsuit, on 28th of May 2013, the ECHR ordered the Serbian state to pay salary arrears plus 3100 euros of compensation for each worker, a total sum of 540,000 euros

Today the former Leteks kombinat – and the whole industrial district – is a de-industrialised, ruined wasteland on the outskirts of town. The buildings of Leteks, Zeleks, Srbijanka and Kosta Stamenković, are in complete ruin. As a result of the overall fall of the textile industry, 12,000 workers became unemployed in the textile sector in Leskovac, a considerable number for a municipality of 156,260 inhabitants (census 2002, ESI 2007). The transition deeply affected both men and women who were employed in the industry. Snežana, one of the workers who filed the lawsuit against the Serbian state, recalled in a recent documentary the times she went to work without receiving a salary: “I am a weaver by profession and so I worked three shifts, like every mother, like every woman. Until we earned our wages everything was easier, everything until was no more money and all the rest. You go every day to work but there is no money, there is nothing. For those 24 months we did not see one dinar, but we went to work. The children had nothing for breakfast, one went to the secondary school, the other to the primary school, but I had nothing to give them. A fried egg at home, a slice of bread, that’s all.”¹³

¹³ The interview, taken from the documentary *Letex Blues*, is quoted in the book *Europa ne stanuje u Babusnici, građani protiv Srbije pred sudom u Strazburu* (Europe does not live in Babusnica, citizens against the Serbian state at the court of Strasbourg). The book lists different court cases waged by citizens against the Serbian state. In 2012, there were 9,950 citizens who had filed a court case against Serbia at the ECHR, placing Serbia on the fifth place after Ukraine, Italy, Turkey and Russia (Rakić-Vodinelić, Gajin and Reljanović 2013). Both the documentary and the book are available online:

During the transition period, many workers remained without jobs and without pensions. The privatisation and bankruptcy of many social factories caused the loss of many years of wages and social contributions. Slavica, whom I interviewed in Leskovac, who was formerly employed in the textile factory in Vlasotince, did not get any compensation when she lost her job after 21 years of work and paid social contributions. She is now 57 years old, she has worked 21 years, and she has to wait until 63 years old for her pension (since in the meantime the minimum retirement age has increased). Her husband is in the same situation, while her son of 33 years old is also unemployed. While the socialist state used to provide a stable job corresponding to one's qualification, after 1989 the disappearance of state protection was flagrant: *"No one asked anything...and we, textile workers, ended all up on the street."*

These testimonies reflect the loss of status of the former industrial working class in Serbia, and the devastating effects of the process of privatisation and the plunder of industrial wealth led by the new state and corporate elites, which provoked the gradual de-industrialisation of the peripheries. As Musić (2013a:23) notes, out of a labour force of 3.2 million, 700,000 people were left without a job by the end of the 1990s. The process of privatisation went on after the fall of Milošević and the liberalisation of the 2000s. New factory owners were often not interested in maintaining the industrial production, but rather in selling the property as real estate. Around 25 per cent of privatisations were thus annulled and the property returned to the state, as in the case of Leteks. Economic wealth remained concentrated in the urban centres of Belgrade and Novi Sad, while provincial towns such as Leskovac were de-industrialised. According to estimates, the industrial sector in Serbia employs today 35 per cent less people than in the late 1980s (Musić 2013a:30-31). Former workers rely on the informal sector for survival, as well as on agricultural work and remittances from abroad. The creation of wealth that resulted from post-socialist transition, in fact, did not improve the living standards of former industrial workers. When it comes to social citizenship and social security, former workers have been particularly vulnerable during the context of post-socialist transition: *"For the industrial working class, transition proved to be a horror without end"* (Musić 2013a:32).

The process of de-industrialisation and loss of employment also had a negative impact on gender relations in Leskovac. According to the representatives of the NGO "Women for Peace" (Žene za Mir), who provide an SOS telephone line against domestic violence, the collapse of the textile industry caused a great increase in social problems. Domestic violence against women and children increased due to men's unemployment and alcoholism. At the same time, according to the representatives of the NGO, domestic violence is often accompanied by women's economic dependency, making it difficult for women to abandon violent households.

Moreover, many women who lost their jobs in the textile industry are often suffering from depression and psychosomatic diseases.

Former workers feel that they have lost their social entitlements, and also, as a consequence, their right to make themselves heard in the political realm. Political representatives are seen as extremely far from the everyday need of the population. To quote Slavica's words: *"I am a member of this society. [But] We are nowhere, nowhere. Absolutely nowhere. We are only on the electoral register, when the election time comes, we are here to vote. That's it"* As this quote makes clear, textile workers' worsening of social citizenship also entailed a changed perception of their political and civil rights. The inability to make themselves heard by new political elites, in contrast to socialist times, brought a sense of political and civic disempowerment. This phenomenon is characteristic not only of textile workers, but of industrial workers more generally (Musić 2013:28; see also Vodopivec 2012).

Against present circumstances of invisibility and disempowerment, the collective memory of socialist times is invoked and mobilised by workers, as a way to re-establish their dignity and the dignity of their labour: "the image of the past as a better time serves as the source of self-respect", since the factory often was "a place of identification and pride" (Musić 2013:47; see also Petrović 2010 and Vodopivec 2010). In Leskovac, for instance, the former textile employees I interviewed recalled with pride the quality, efficiency and discipline that existed in their factory, highlighting their personal contribution to the economic success of the factory and to society in general. According to Slavica, a former textile worker, the fall of the textile industry provoked the loss of "working habits" among the inhabitants of Leskovac. In contrast, the working discipline existing during socialism was recalled as positive, and associated with a sense of security, prestige and order: *"that industry was very well organised, and I am sorry that everything fell apart like that (...) So much work, so much discipline at work"*. As noted by Stenning (2005), industrial workers who were employed during socialism interiorised the working discipline as a moral code of conduct, which created social meaning and identity in their daily lives.

The quality of the clothing produced in the factory was also emphasised. Dragan, for instance, recalled with pride: "I had the honour to make a cloth which was called Mrs Carter (*Gospođa Carter*), what a yellow colour it was! Incredible! It was such a high quality cloth, it never got dirty, it was so beautiful. It was called Mrs Carter, from the wife of Jimmy Carter. It went directly into the nylon because it was such high quality". Despite the fact that their factories have long ceased production, former industrial workers often recall the quality of the products they used to make, and the prestige associated with these products, locally and internationally. As noted by Jambrešić-Kirin and Blagaić for the case of the Jugoplastika factory in Split: "It is not only a matter of longing for the period of security, stability, prosperity, and sociability, or for a meaningful and dignified life; it is a matter of identifying with the success of a factory whose products were marketed on the Yugoslav and foreign markets, as well as about the feeling of pride in the steady growth of the company (...)" (2013:49-50). The memories of successful industrial production and successful

industrial relations are associated with a time in which Yugoslavia held a more prestigious role internationally, and in which workers often had the perception (now lost) of belonging to “Europe”, both symbolically and materially (Petrović 2010).

Nowadays, apart from some small factories, the only notable textile factory in Leskovac is the German firm Falke, producing high quality socks, which opened in early 2012 and which is planning to employ 600 workers in the medium term (at the moment, however, around 200 are employed).¹⁴ The firm obtained 2.4 million euro from the Serbian government, as part of Serbia’s incentives to foreign direct investment. Falke has been built on the premises of the former socially-owned textile factory Inkol. In the last years, former workers from Inkol protested in front of Falke. Falke bought Inkol for 33.7 million dinars, but the majority of Inkol’s 500 former workers are still due 40 wages. At the end of the 1990s, the local government promised textile workers that they would receive unpaid wages once Inkol, then bankrupt, was sold, but this never happened. Inkol workers have been fighting for compensation for the last 14 years.¹⁵ The other notable company is the South-Korean cable company Yura, which employs around 1370 workers, many of whom are women. In 2011, some 15 workers’ contracts were not renewed without explanation, allegedly since the management objected to the fact that workers made use of their sick leave. A trade union representative from Leskovac reported that workers were afraid to take action even after having been fired, and that it was difficult for trade unions to intervene since the firm did not allow trade union activities on its premises.¹⁶ Yura was also supposed to employ more workers over time, but the hiring process was suspended due to the recession in South Korea.¹⁷

The weakness of trade unionism is a general problem in Serbia and in other post-Yugoslav states (see Eufound 2012 reports). Trade union membership diminished as a result of de-industrialisation and unemployment, and is very scarce in the newly founded private sector. A number of labour protests conducted by industrial workers took place in the last two decades, to protest against unpaid wages, dismissals and bankruptcy (Grdešić and Meszmann, 2008; see also Musić 2013: 42-46). In the absence of strong trade unions and of on-going industrial production, however, workers often resorted to the blockade of public transports and public spaces, as well as to extreme methods such as hunger strikes and self-victimisation (Musić 2013:47). Another path that has been taken – although difficult for its duration and costs – is the one of local and international lawsuits, as in the case of former Leteks workers (Rakić-Vodinelić, Gajin and Reljanović 2013).

¹⁴ <http://voiceofserbia.org/content/falke-opens-factory-leskovac> (Last accessed 25-05-2013).

¹⁵ <http://www.vesti.rs/%C5%A0trajk/Leskovac-protest-radnika-konfekcije-Inkol-40-meseci-bez-plate.html> (Last accessed 25-05-2013)

¹⁶ <http://jugmedia.info/2012/11/24/jura-otpustila-petnaest-radnika-zbog-bolovanja/> (Last accessed 25-05-2013)

¹⁷ <http://jugmedia.info/2012/11/30/jura-obustavila-prijem-novih-radnika/> (Last accessed 25-05-2013).

Most of the struggles conducted in the last two decades were unsuccessful. One notable exception is the successful struggle around the factory *Jugoremedija*, a pharmaceutical company located in Zrenjanin, where workers-shareholders managed to halt a shady procedure of privatisation between the state and a criminal buyer, and regained control of production, establishing a successful business on the basis of self-management principles. A solidarity movement of students and media activists also choose to support the workers in their legal struggle and in their media campaigns. The case of *Jugoremedija* became well-known and inspirational within movements for social justice in Serbia, as well as internationally (Pokret za Slobodu 2011; Musić 2013; Grdešić and Meszmann, 2007).

3.2. *Post-socialist textile production: the case of Štip*

Similarly to Leskovac, the town of Štip, located in Eastern Macedonia, with a population of 50,000 inhabitants, became a relevant textile centre during socialist times. The whole region was known for its production of silk, cloth and laces in the 19th and early 20 century. Štip's main "kombinat" – that is, a colossal textile complex combining different production processes for yarn, raw fabrics and finished products – was the "Makedonka" factory, which employed several thousand workers. This factory was created in the early 1950s as a result of the industrialisation drive and their products were mainly sold on the internal market. A centralised heating system and a railway line were included in the "Makedonka" complex. Cotton was produced in Macedonia until the 1970s, but in the 1970s and 1980s cotton was mainly imported from countries that were allied to Yugoslavia through the Non-Aligned Movement, such as India and Egypt. Weaving plants and apparel producers which depended on the "Makedonka" complex were gradually built in Štip and in surrounding towns and villages to absorb the great number of unemployed people living in the region.

"Makedonka" included a restaurant for the workers serving one free meal per day, discount stores, childcare facilities, and library, and a choir which performed around town. The factory also provided housing to its workers, through a complex of apartment buildings. "Makedonka" also provided holiday facilities on the shores of the Ohrid Lake, a summer resort on the mountain Plachkovica, and a hotel at Lake Dojran. The workers could make use of the hotel resorts for symbolic prices. Workers could also take interest-free credits and advances on their wages for a variety of purposes. (CRPM 2005:18). As Nina Vodopivec (2010:221) notes, textile factories in Macedonia and throughout Yugoslavia "actually structured the lives of the employees and their families. In small towns they also shaped the everyday life of the community" (Vodopivec 2012: 620). Also, textile factories were seen as having

“great emancipating and modernising potential, particularly for female workers” (Vodopivec 2012: 621).¹⁸

The number of workers of “Makedonka” went from 3500 in the mid-1960s to a maximum of 5700 in 1987 (CRPM 2005: 21). The other main factory for the production of ready-made garments, Astibo, was founded in the 1960s, and employed thousands of workers in Štip and in surrounding villages. In the 1970s, Astibo became the main producer of casual apparel in Yugoslavia, with 60 shops all over the country. In the early 1980s “Astibo” had 3700 workers, and the factory had grown so much it included “a health care institution (*zdravstvena stanica*), a restaurant, and a day care centre for employees’ children (*detska ustanova*)”. The health care institution also had “a unit for gynaecological treatment offering, among others, counselling about the use of contraceptives, a lab, a paediatrician, and a dentist unit.” The company also built houses for its workers in Štip (CRPM 2005: 23). Because of inflation on the Yugoslav market in the 1980s, “Astibo” chose to focus on exports; after the early 1980s it was producing mainly for foreign partners through the OPT system. Also, loans were made to pay workers’ wages in Makedonka in the 1980s. The disintegration of the Yugoslav market in the 1990s and the impossibility to make financial claims throughout Yugoslavia brought “Makedonka” to a deeper crisis. A restructuring program was inaugurated in the early 1990s, and workers were laid off in different waves. The privatization process started in 1995, and eight different entities were created from eight different departments of the factory. These entities, however, did not recover and in 2000 a bankruptcy procedure was started by the government. Several attempts of privatization of the whole complex failed, and the company was put into liquidation and sold piece by piece from 2001 onwards. Many costly machines were disbanded and stolen, or sold as scrap metal. Since 2003, private owners created several small companies on the premises of “Makedonka”. Many building from that complex, however, are in ruin nowadays. The “Astibo” complex, instead, was bought by a consortium of enterprises in 2002, and its main building was fully renovated (CRPM 2005:25-36).

Several small textile firms (*konfekcije*) appeared in Štip during the transition period. A recent report (CRPM 2005:37) lists 58 firms, employing some 5600 workers on the premises of formerly socially owned enterprises. This amounts to 45% of those employed in the city. Logistics, transport companies and intermediaries related to the business have also developed since the transition. The factories are mainly producing garments for the Western market. Women are mainly employed in textile factories in Štip, while men are driving taxis or working in the logistic sector. Recently, however, men who could not find other professions have also started to look for work in textile factories. As mentioned earlier, Štip is presented as a success story in policy making

¹⁸ Vodopivec is taking the example of the Mura factory, in Murska Subota, Slovenia. During socialism, Slovenia was seen as the most developed republic, in charge of providing the other ‘developing’ republics with its expertise. The textile factory in Mura was seen as particularly beneficial for the emancipation of female workers coming from the less developed republics of Yugoslavia (2012:621).

documents, as opposed to Leskovac, where textile production has completely declined (see ESI 2007).

Textile workers' living conditions in Štip, however, are quite difficult. The exploitative conditions of workers in the Macedonian textile industry have been the object of a recent report (2012) by the Clean Clothes Campaign, an international alliance of labour rights organisations, unions and NGOs that are campaigning for the respect of workers' rights in the garment industry. The report took into consideration Macedonian factories producing work wear for the army and for well-known airlines in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The report highlighted multiple violations of human rights and workers' rights existing in these factories: poverty wages that are 19% of a living wage, forced overtime with Saturdays as "normal" working days, short-term labour contract, health concerns and lack of trade union representatives. Gender discrimination is also apparent since workers in textile are 85% women, and wages in the textile sector are around one third of wages in other industrial sectors. Women often rely on subsistence agriculture to supplement their low wages, and this further increases their working hours (CCC 2012: 9).

The findings of the report resonate with the testimonies I collected in Štip: working conditions in the factories are often unsafe, with peaks of heat and cold due to the absence of air conditioning or heating systems. Workers are often forced to work overtime according to the urgency of external orders, and are often subjected to the arbitrariness of their bosses. Trade unions are completely absent from these factories. The workers I interviewed earn an average of 150-200 euros a month, but they are performing more skilled tasks than ordinary seamstresses, whose salaries are around 100-150 euros a month. The nation-wide minimum wage for textile workers in Macedonia, 102 euros, is even lower than the nation-wide net minimum wage of 131 euros established in 2012. This is lower than minimum wages in China or Indonesia (CCC 2012:3). The minimum wage in textile, clothing and leather manufacturing will be harmonised with the minimum wage in other sectors only in 2015 (Saveski, Sadiku and Vasilev 2013:10).

The sense of social uncertainty is extremely high. The narratives of former and current textile workers recall the shock of post-socialist transition and the feeling of precariousness which suddenly fell upon them. In the case of Nada, for instance, the 1990s represented a traumatic period. When her parents lost their job in "Makedonka", Nada, then a university student, had to leave Skopje, where she was studying English literature, and look for work back in Štip. She found a job in a private textile factory, also thanks to the fact that she knew English and could act as an intermediary with foreign clients. Nada supported her parents with her salary for eight months, until they found work again in the private sector.

Working conditions in the 1990s were particularly exploitative, since the new entrepreneurs took advantage of political uncertainty and poorly defined legal regulations at the expense of the workers: *"There was never security. At that time they earned a lot of money because we worked for low wages and they paid no contributions whatsoever. (...) There were rules, but they were not so strict, so they could pay holidays or*

half holidays, not pay social contributions etc. (...). They earned a lot of money and people worked very hard." According to the testimonies collected in Štip, in more recent times, after state intervention, legal provisions in favour of workers were enforced with more severity, notably when it came to the legal registration of workers and the payment of social contributions (health, pension, invalidity). At the same time, the semi-legal conditions experienced during the transition period provoked a number of consequences. As happened in Leskovac, many workers in Štip lost years of social contributions. Nada lost four years of social contributions: *"There is no way to get those back. Some people sued their owners and they won, but they spent so much money in the trials, I cannot do that"*.

Even if the social security rights have slightly improved in comparison to the 1990s and early 2000s, when it comes to working conditions and working time the workers are still very much dependent on the decisions of the factory owners and on the urgency of orders coming from foreign partners. Beside workers' low wages, the competitiveness of textile in South-Eastern Europe is largely due to its proximity to Western Europe, as opposed to Asia. Because of this proximity, small quantities of garments can be ordered and produced relatively quickly. The working time, therefore, is largely dictated by the speed and quantity of the orders from abroad. All over Štip, when talking with workers and taxi drivers, one can hear complaints about the condition of textile workers, who are working very long hours for very low wages. These strenuous working rhythms often have consequences for workers' health, particularly when it comes to women. Nada recalled that in the 1990s she used to work so hard that she did not realize she was four months pregnant, until she fainted at work: *I was working the third shift (night), and then second shift (afternoon), and then first shift (morning), so I thought, since I am not eating regularly, I am not sleeping regularly, the cycle stopped, like with people in concentration camps*.

Ana, another textile worker in a private factory, recalled one recent instance in which she had to work on a Saturday from 6 am until 4 am the next day, since some orders had to be completed and shipped urgently. According to textile workers, working rhythms are often very strenuous since many factory owners promise unrealistic results to their foreign partners, and are not able to calculate the real productivity of labour in relation to the work force capacity. The psychological pressure on workers is often very high. Ana and Nada explicitly referred to episodes of *mobbing* in a factory in which they both worked. Nada defined *mobbing* as something characteristic of post-socialist times, and as the reason why she kept changing workplace: *"At work there is a lot of pressure, until now we did not know what mobbing was. Before privatisation that did not exist, after the privatisation it came like something...normal. Democracy. Bosses can do it, owners can do it, and between workers as well (...) I cannot stand that. I change job, like that, I will find some other one. Until I have these two hands, no one can do that to me, right?"*

The contemporary post-socialist setting, characterised by selfishness, corruption and lack of values, is often opposed to the socialist setting, and to the values of humanity and respect proper of the older generations. Faulty management

practices in post-socialist times are often opposed to factory management in socialist times, when the organisation of labour on the shop floor and productivity levels were much better, according to former workers. Generally, working conditions under socialism are remembered in positive terms, since textile workers were rewarded with much higher social security and with a greater status in society. Nostalgia for socialist times is widespread, due to the lack of social security experienced in post-socialist times, and due to the overall perception of diminished political and social rights.¹⁹ As Vera, Nada's mother, recalls from her time in "Makedonka", the meaning of work was different in socially-owned factories: *"It was like working for something that belonged to us"*. Workers' wages were sufficient to guarantee good standards of living for workers, and workers felt rewarded through the wage and through other benefits. Nowadays, workers feel instead that they receive little in exchange for their hard work. Also, workers resent the lack of transparency about directors' salaries, and perceive their current position as one of exploitation. The situation of textile workers in Macedonia can be compared to the case of Slovenia, where, as Nina Vodopivec (2010: 229) notes, "textile workers share a common notion that their status as workers has been degraded in post-socialism". Their remembrance of better working conditions in socialist times, thus, is not so much a political identification but rather "a strategy they use to secure their position and constitute their own selves in the post-socialist world" (2010:229).

The social rights connected to the workers' status during socialism are often compared to the lack of social rights experienced after the transition. Paid summer holidays, for instance - a symbol of socialist times in Yugoslav popular culture (Grandits and Taylor 2010) - have become simply out of reach. Textile workers in Štip these days are often only able to benefit from a few days of annual leave during March or September-October, during the mid-fashion season. In summer, instead, the production levels are very high and workers are discouraged from taking holidays. Ana, for instance, decided to take a holiday to be with her children on the seaside, and the result was that her salary was cut by 100 euros. Vera, Nada's mother, could no longer afford holidays after the transition. She compares her living standards in socialist and post-socialist times as follows: *"I could, at that time, take care of two daughters with two wages from "Makedonka", have two flats, and go to holiday...today I cannot. Today we work, I, my husband, my daughter and her husband, and we have only two kids, and we cannot."*

¹⁹ As Maria Todorova has recently noted, mainstream discourse treats nostalgia in the post-communist world as a "malady", an anachronism, a dysfunctional attitude towards a "seductive" yet "deadly" ideology. This simplified view limits our understanding of the phenomenon, which is related, above all, to a "desire among those who have lived through communism, even when they have opposed it or were indifferent to its ideology, to invest their lives with meaning and dignity, not to be thought of, remembered, or bemoaned as losers or 'slaves'" (Todorova 2010:7). As argued by Mitja Velikonja, in the post-Yugoslav space the memory of the past is often mobilised to criticise present injustices, ethnicisation of politics and amnesia, expressing a fundamental "wish for better times" (Velikonja 2008: 132-133).

When it comes to working mothers' position, the situation in former Yugoslavia is similar to the one observed by Leontina M. Hormel in post-socialist Ukraine: women in the textile industry experience lower social security, as a result of the "decline in the state-imposed "working-mother" gender contract: an implicit contract obliging the state to help women workers mediate family and work responsibilities" (Hormel 2011: 11; see also Read and Thelen 2007). Now that the socialist "worker-mother" contract is no longer in place, women's "double burden" of productive and reproductive work has become heavier, since women's wages are necessary to guarantee the survival of the household, while at the same time women continue to be the main-caretakers for children, the infirm and the elderly, since the welfare state is almost non-existent. Intergenerational solidarity is widespread, particularly among women, who continue to be the ones in charge of social reproduction and care across generations: while older women help their daughters with childcare, since private options are costly, younger women are generally taking care of the elderly and of the ill, and are paying for medical expenses of their older parents or in-laws. Intergenerational solidarity is also working for housing purposes, since the parents' generation had access to housing more easily and thus could help younger couples with housing issues, as in the case of Nada, who swapped her smaller apartment with her parents' bigger one to suit the needs of her family. The possibility for intergenerational solidarity, however, has also changed with the transition. Nada worries that she will not be able to afford to pay for her daughter to go to university: *"When my parents worked it was possible to put some money aside, for holidays, for walks, for the school of the kids. Now, with my wage, I cannot do anything"*.

In Štip the family usually takes the role of a safety net against possible economic and social uncertainty. In post-socialist settings, intergenerational solidarity networks based on family ties have become a safety net for many citizens, and particularly for women, who are traditionally in charge of child caring and social reproduction, while at the same time being often the main breadwinners in the household. For women like Nada, who had to give up their professional aspirations because of stalled social mobility in transition times, creating a family became a valuable life purpose: *"I felt I was safe, as my parents. And all of a sudden, bam! I had to leave the studies and start to work. I gave up all my dreams, everything fell to the water. And in those depressive times, I thought that if I create a family, I will have some goal in life, and I will go forward."* In Nada's case, the extended family is described as the place where positive values such as solidarity and care can still be cultivated and reproduced, against the ruthlessness of contemporary Macedonian society: *"With my relatives we see each other a lot. (...) That helps us a lot. That remains. People have lost humanity, tolerance and respect, that does not exist anymore."*

From these quotes it is evident that transformations in gender roles (usually described under the category of "retraditionalisation") are not only a result of nationalist discourses casting women as "mothers of the nation", but also a consequence of women's unemployment and women's precarity on the labour market. These cultural and material elements combine to constitute new post-

socialist gender regimes in the post-Yugoslav space. The Macedonian case can be easily compared to the Croatian case, characterised by “the end of the age emancipation achieved through work accomplishments and the value of work, now replaced by the age of ‘gender mainstreaming’, as well as massive unemployment of women, followed by ambivalently complementary discourses of re-patriarchalisation and consumerism, re-christianisation and sexism” (Jambrešić-Kirin and Blagačić 2013:47).²⁰ The devaluation of women’s labour and the precarity of women on the labour market in the post-Yugoslav space reinforce women’s dependency on extended family networks. As noted by scholars, the importance of family networks in informal economic practices was common during socialism as well (Rubić 2013). In post-socialist times, however, when job security in the public sphere has largely faded, the family – as well as informal economic practices – have an even stronger significance for everyday survival.

The precariousness and daily struggle for survival of textile workers in Štip is far from being an exception in Macedonia. These findings resonate with a number of reports on the conditions of workers in the Macedonian textile industry, and in other industrial sectors (CCC 2012; Saveski, Sadiku and Vasilev 2013). Often presented as a success story of neo-liberalism and privatisation in the region of former Yugoslavia (see ESI 2007), Macedonia is, in fact, one of the most unequal countries in Europe. The unemployment rate is over 30% since 1994. Men’s official employment rates are of 52.3 % while only 30.3% of women are employed (Source Eurostat 2013 – quoted in Saveski, Sadiku and Vasilev 2013:8). Welfare and tax policies towards the most vulnerable groups of society are particularly unequal, with a flat tax on personal incomes which clearly privileges the wealthier strata of society (Ibidem: 11-14). The inequality between wealthiest and poorest incomes is staggering: the highest salary of top managers in 2011 was 630 times higher than the minimal wage of 131 euros (Ibidem: 15). The sense of inequality and injustice experienced by workers in Štip is, therefore, a reflection of structural injustices which are undermining social citizenship and democracy in the country.

Gender plays a very significant role in the stratification of poverty and inequality: as noted by a recent ILO report on the gender pay gap in Macedonia, “the employment rates of women are much lower than those of men. Furthermore, female labour market participation is considerably lower than that of males. Women tend to be concentrated in sectors closely related to the tasks they perform in households (social work, health care, education and, within manufacturing, the textile sector). The work they performed is often undervalued. Women are overrepresented in the textile sector, where international competition is fierce, working conditions are often very poor and workers often work overtime” (Kazandziska, Risteska and Schmidt 2012: 33). The union density in the textile sector, moreover, is extremely low, around

²⁰ Nationalist discourses and policies promoting a “retraditionalisation” of gender roles are, however, still prominent in the region. In June 2013, the Macedonian conservative government approved a restrictive law on abortion rights: <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonia-adopts-controversial-abortion-law> (Last accessed 02-07-2013).

9% (as opposed to 78% in education, 50% in the metal industry, and 30% in construction). This indicates “the deterioration of women’s wage bargaining power as they account for the bulk of employment in this sector” (Ibidem: 2012: 14). According to the 2009 Human Development Report, Macedonia has the highest pay gap among post-socialist countries in SEE and CEE: the ratio of estimated female to male income is 0.49. Montenegro and Serbia score 0.58, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia 0.61, Croatia 0.67 (Ibidem: 2012: 23), showing the significance of the gender pay gap and of gendered poverty in the former Yugoslavia.

4. Concluding remarks

This paper dealt with transformations of social citizenship in post-Yugoslav states from a gendered perspective, on the basis of a specific case study of women textile workers. Despite the emergence of seven post-Yugoslav states and of very different citizenship regimes in the region (see Shaw and Štiks 2012) a common element I have singled out across the post-Yugoslav region (particularly in Serbia, Macedonia, Croatia and Slovenia) is the overall deterioration of social rights for present and former industrial workers in the last twenty years. Contemporary to war and post-war processes of “ethnic engineering” and of the exclusion of members of other ethnic groups from citizenship rights (Shaw and Štiks 2013:8; Štiks 2013:22-23), a parallel process of “social engineering” and gradual disempowerment of working class population was enacted, as a result of economic “re-peripheralisation” (Schierup 1992) and of the appropriation of previously socially owned economic assets by new economic and political elites in the course of the transition process.

If we recall Roche’s definition of social rights, after Marshall (“individuals’ lifelong rights to income maintenance, and to access to employment, to health services, and to accommodation on the basis of need”), it is evident that for many post-Yugoslav citizens in the course of post-socialist transition these rights have often been discontinued, and sometimes have vanished, partially or in their entirety. Across the former Yugoslavia, former workers are still reclaiming years of unpaid salaries and social contributions. The difficulty for these citizens to make themselves heard by new political elites is in stark contrast with workers’ social and political status during socialist times (Music 2013a; 2013b). The weakness of trade unions in the region – particularly in the industrial sector – contributes to the disempowerment of workers and former workers. In order to claim their social rights, post-Yugoslav citizens are often recurring to political activism, through protests, hunger strikes, factory occupations, and lawsuits at the local and European level.

Changes in gender relations and in gender regimes are intersecting with transformations in social and economic citizenship. Due to traditional and renewed forms of gender discrimination in the productive and reproductive sphere, women have been more vulnerable to unemployment and poverty, and have often been pushed to the margins of the labour market as well as into the informal economy. The gender pay gap in the region has been on the rise, contributing to further social

inequality and stratification of citizenship rights along gender lines, as well as along ethnic and class lines. In this paper I have illustrated the interdependency of gender regimes and citizenship regimes' transformations on the basis of the case study of a "feminised" industrial sector, the textile industry. The consequences of the collapse of the textile and garment industry in Leskovac, as well as the current working conditions of women textile workers in Štip have been highlighted. I have notably stressed how post-socialist transformations in citizenship regimes entailed the dismantlement of the pre-existing "working mother" gender contract, which had guaranteed basic welfare and working standards to women workers in socialist times. In the post-socialist gender regime, characterised by a withdrawal of the welfare state, intergenerational solidarity networks based on family ties have become extremely important. As a consequence of women's unemployment and precarity on the labour market, women increasingly rely on and contribute to extended family networks.

The "retraditionalisation" of gender relations in the post-Yugoslav region, therefore, is not only a consequence of nationalist discourses, but is also a direct result of the deterioration of social citizenship, i.e. working rights and welfare rights. While textile workers worked equally hard during socialist times, their status in society, their social benefits and their job security were much higher. Textile workers during socialism could benefit from low housing and living expenses, and their wages had a different purchasing power, being closer and even superior to living wages. The social standards of the past are remembered nostalgically by the current generation of textile workers, who are facing a withdrawal of the welfare state and diminished social security. Similarly to garment workers' conditions in Central and Eastern Europe and Asia, textile workers' lives in the post-Yugoslav region are characterized by extreme precariousness and exploitation, as a result of post-socialist de-industrialisation, renewed dependency from Western markets, and as a consequence of the "race to the bottom" for production costs which characterises the transnational garment industry.

The narratives of textile workers in Leskovac and Štip illustrate the far-reaching transformations in social citizenship that have occurred in the region, as well as their profoundly gendered character. In a region in which social citizenship is shaped by multiple inequalities, in which unemployment rates are extremely high and in which industrial workers are strongly disempowered, women have to face additional forms of gendered discrimination, resulting in women's enhanced precarity and vulnerability in their lived experiences of productive and reproductive labour.

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